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**BREAKING
HOME
TIES**

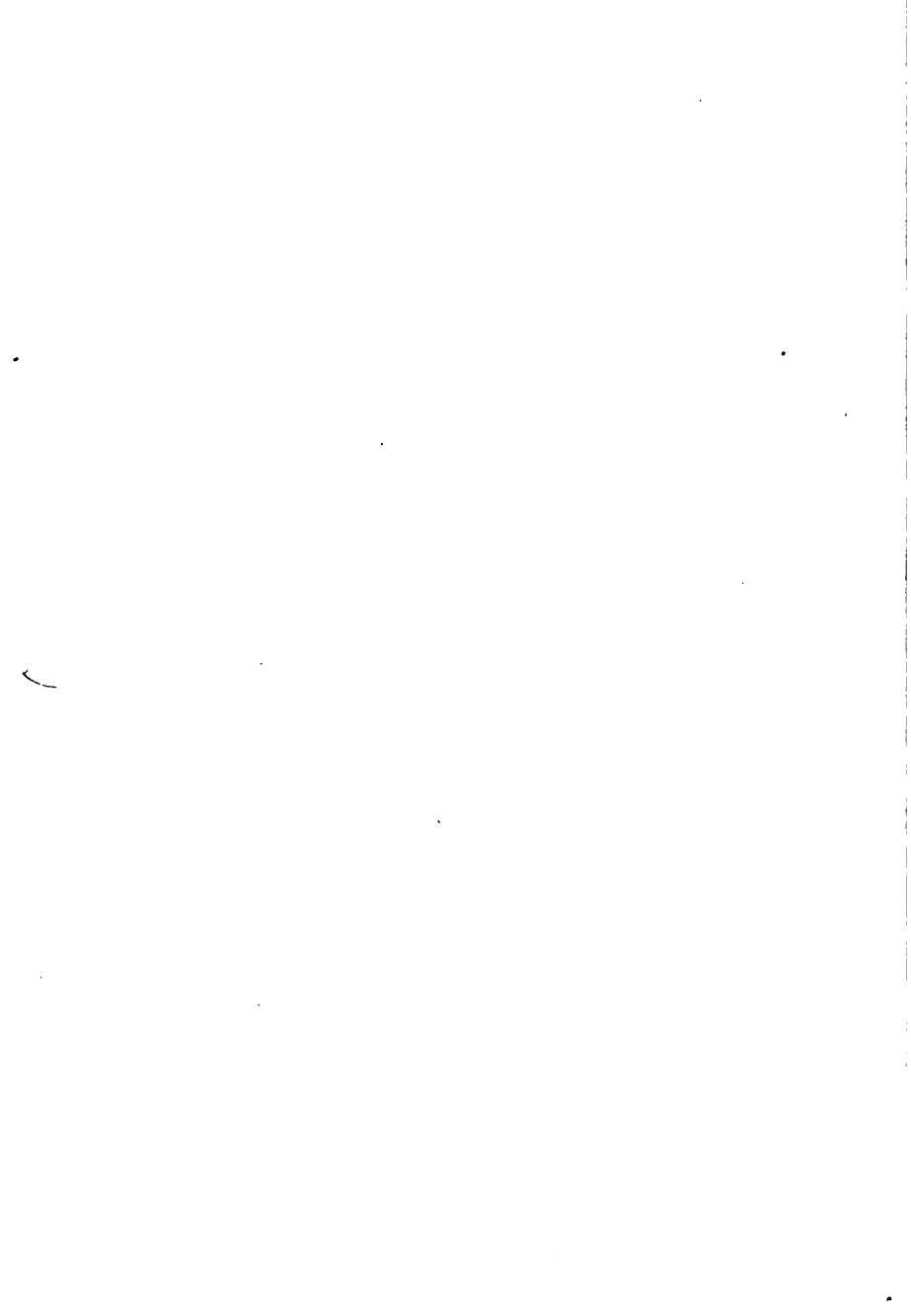
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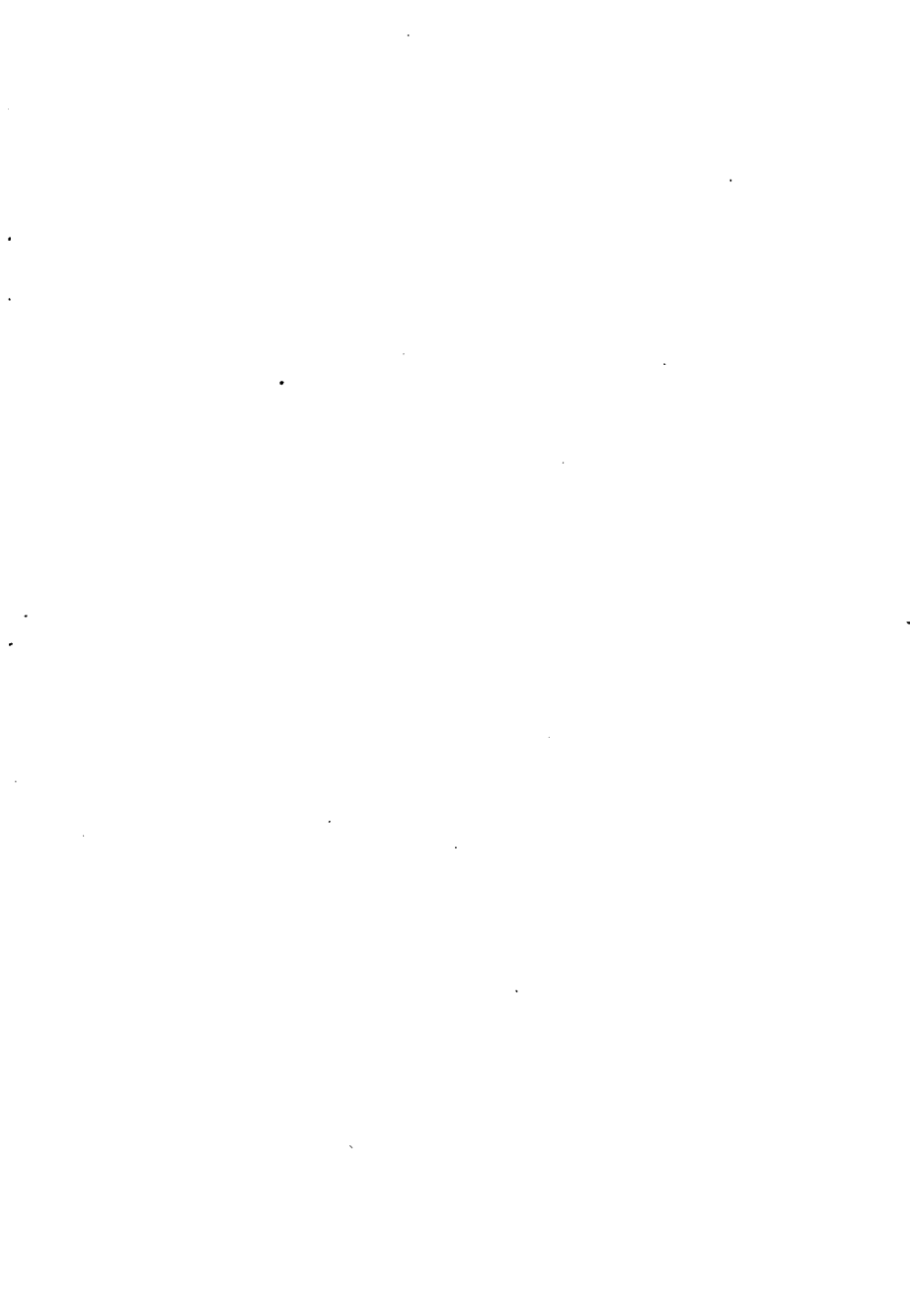


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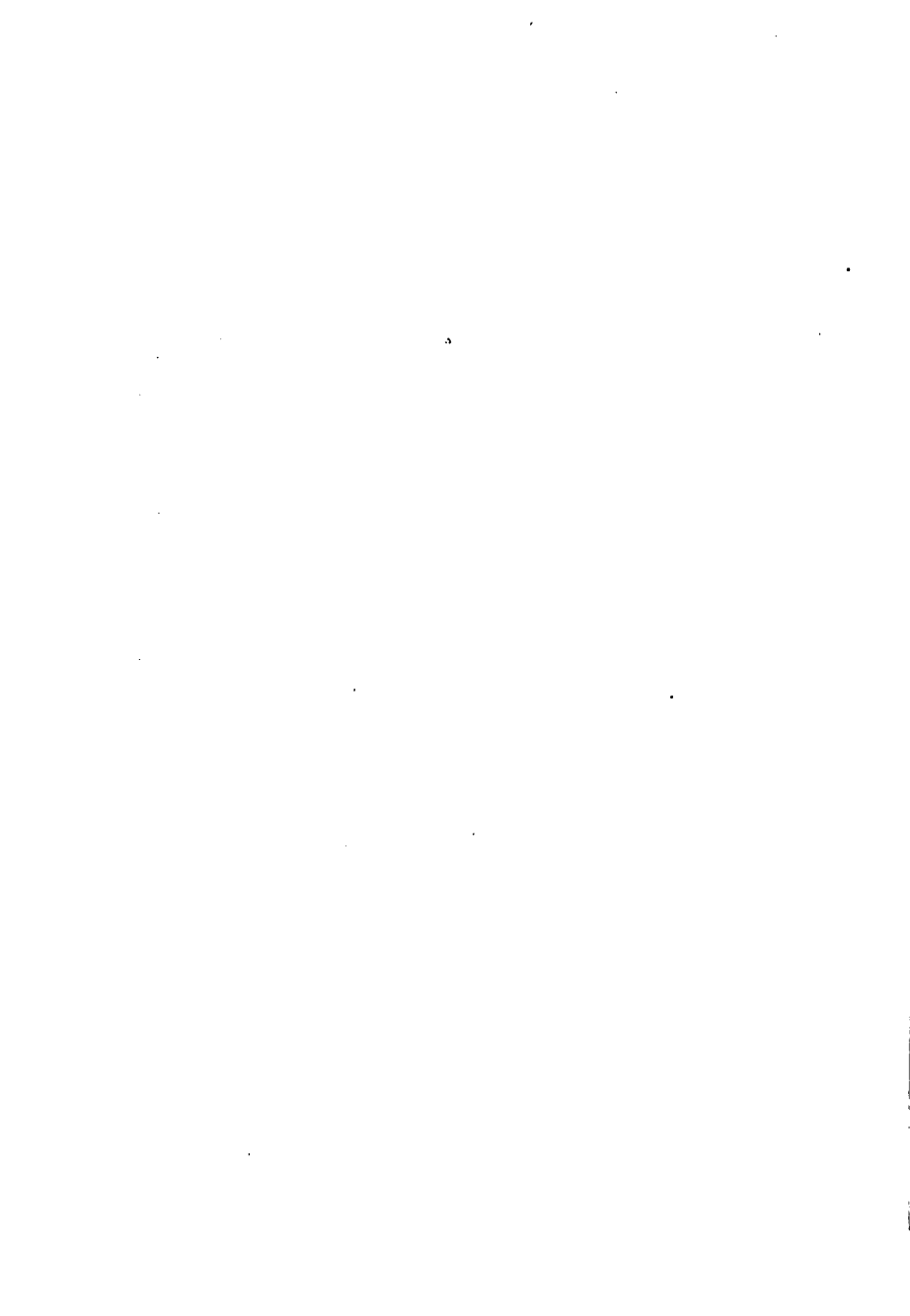












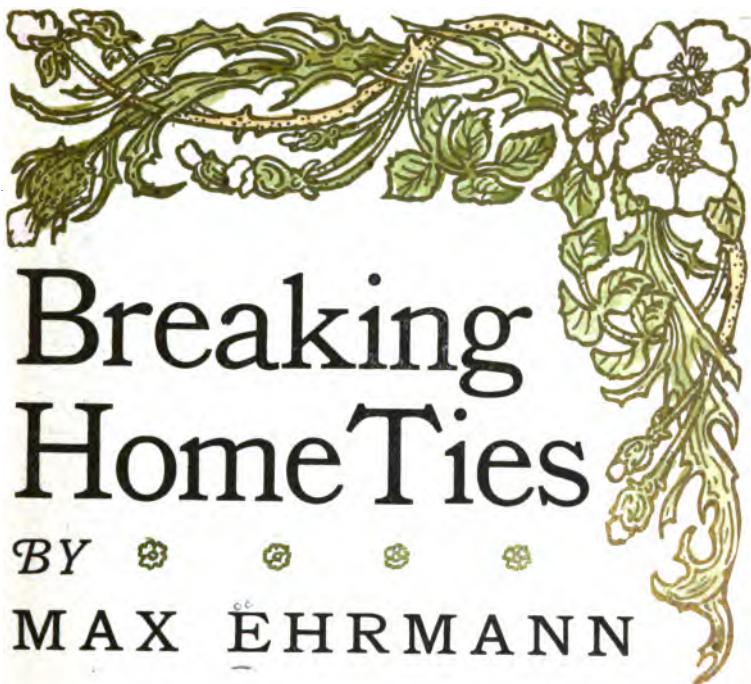


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BREAKING HOME TIES
By HOVENDEN





Breaking Home Ties

BY    
MAX EHRMANN

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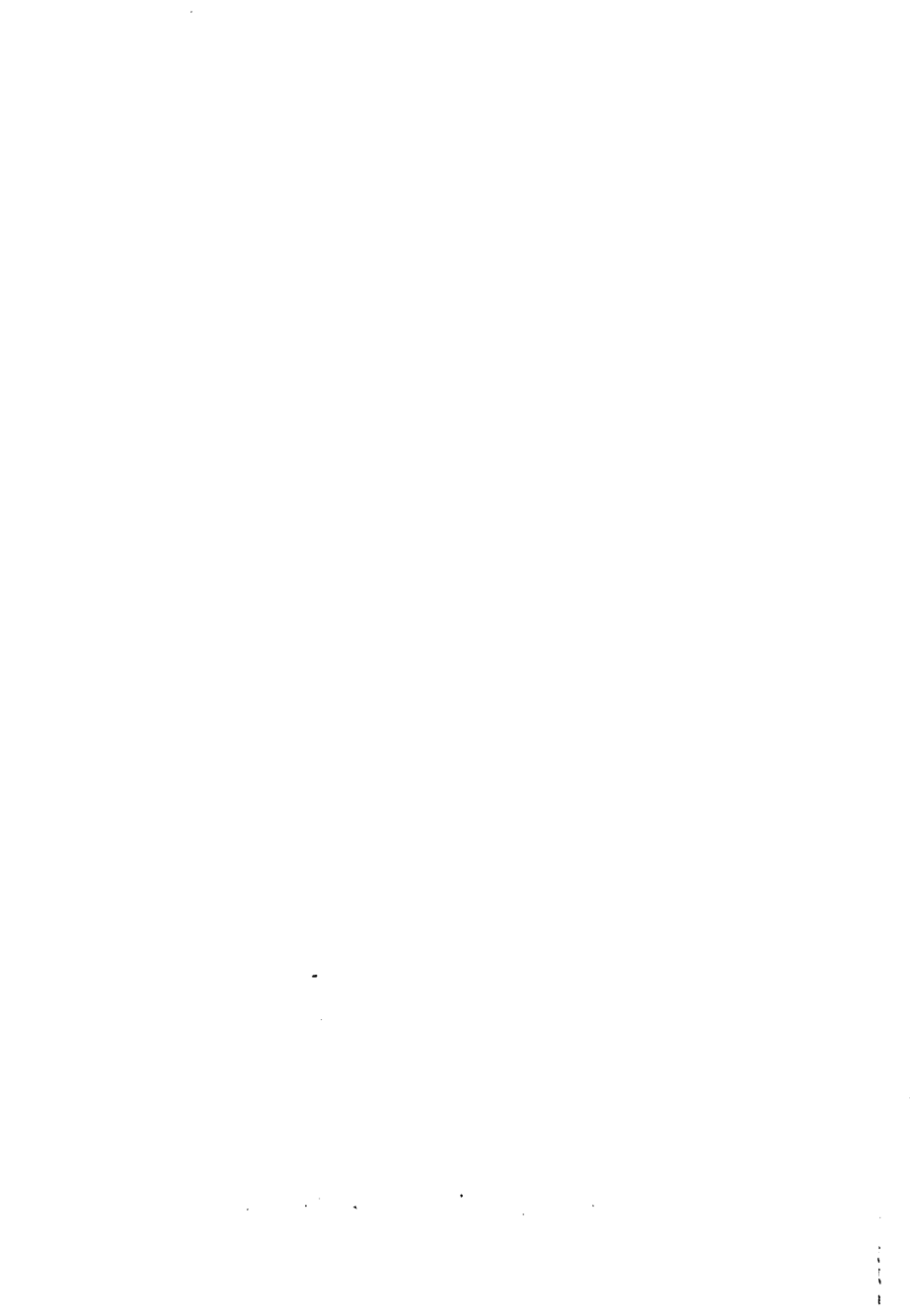
NOV 1904
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BREAKING HOME TIES



Anderson, Jan. 1916. P. 23





TO you, beloved youth, who stand half turned
From childhood's quiet scenes, and look away
Where mystic shafts of light begin to play
Above the dawn of years yet undiscerned,
Where life's hard-won rewards are lost and earned—

To you whose love is life for those grown gray ;
Though I ne'er see your face, to you I say
These words that oft within my heart have burned.
Though friends shall shake their heads and come not near
To me, and hardened words around me fly,
Or all untouched the book on table lie,
Were you my own sweet flesh and blood held dear,
I'd speak to you, beloved youth, as I
Have spoken to this child of fancy here.







MY son, you see that picture hang-
ing there—

The one that's squared in oak
beside the door?

From early boyish talk you
oft have asked

In many ways what meaning there I saw ;
And oft I sent you on with heedless words,
Sometimes a tale that pleased your early youth.
But years have changed all this, and in your voice



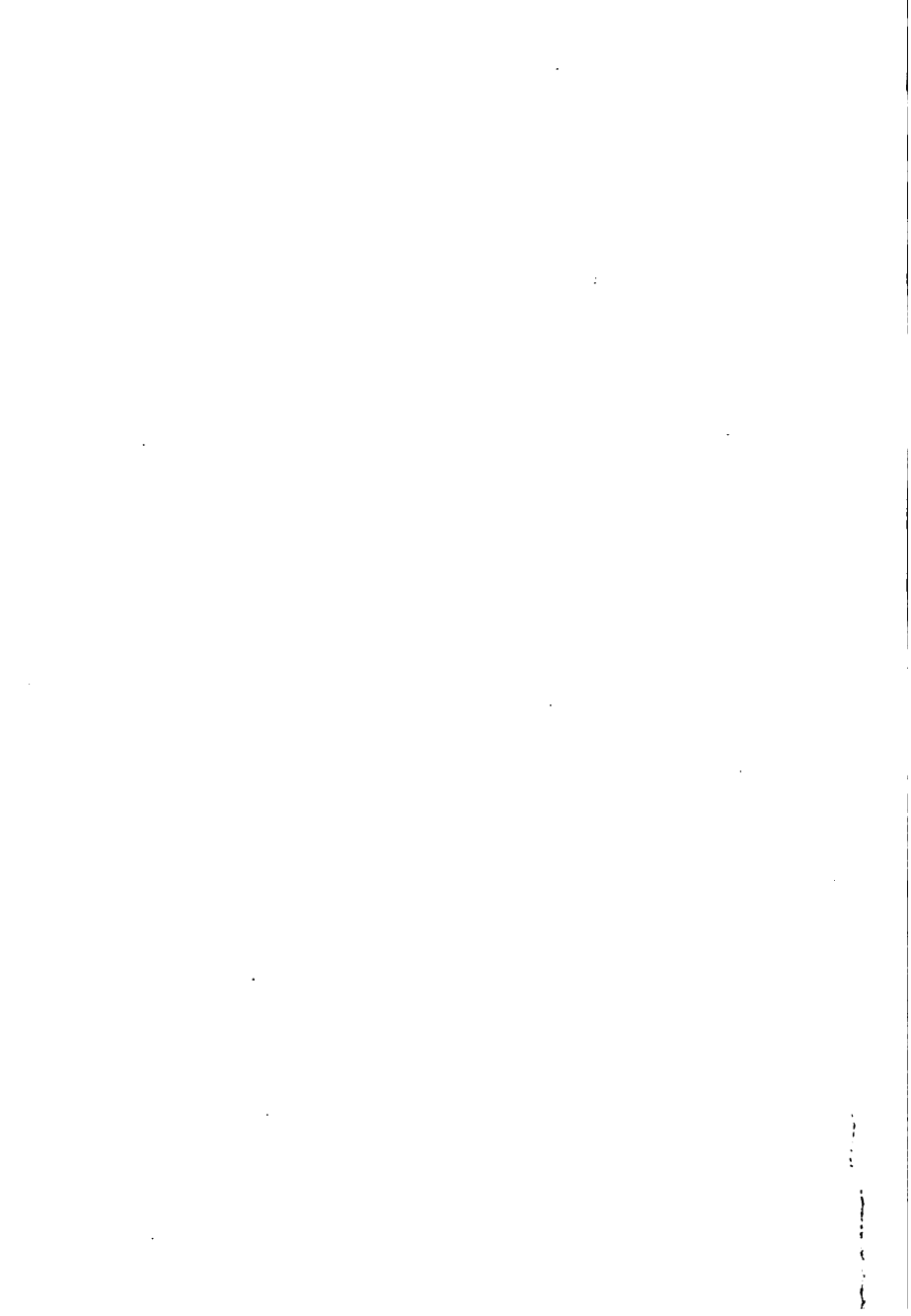




I often hear the echo of a man,
And now light answers satisfy no more
Your anxious looks and eager questioning ;
And thus 'tis good and right that you should
know.

A father's duty lies not short of truth,
And what I've lived to learn you too shall learn.
Come here and sit down near beside me—so.
And while the evening comes to quietude,
And we are here alone, I'll tell you all

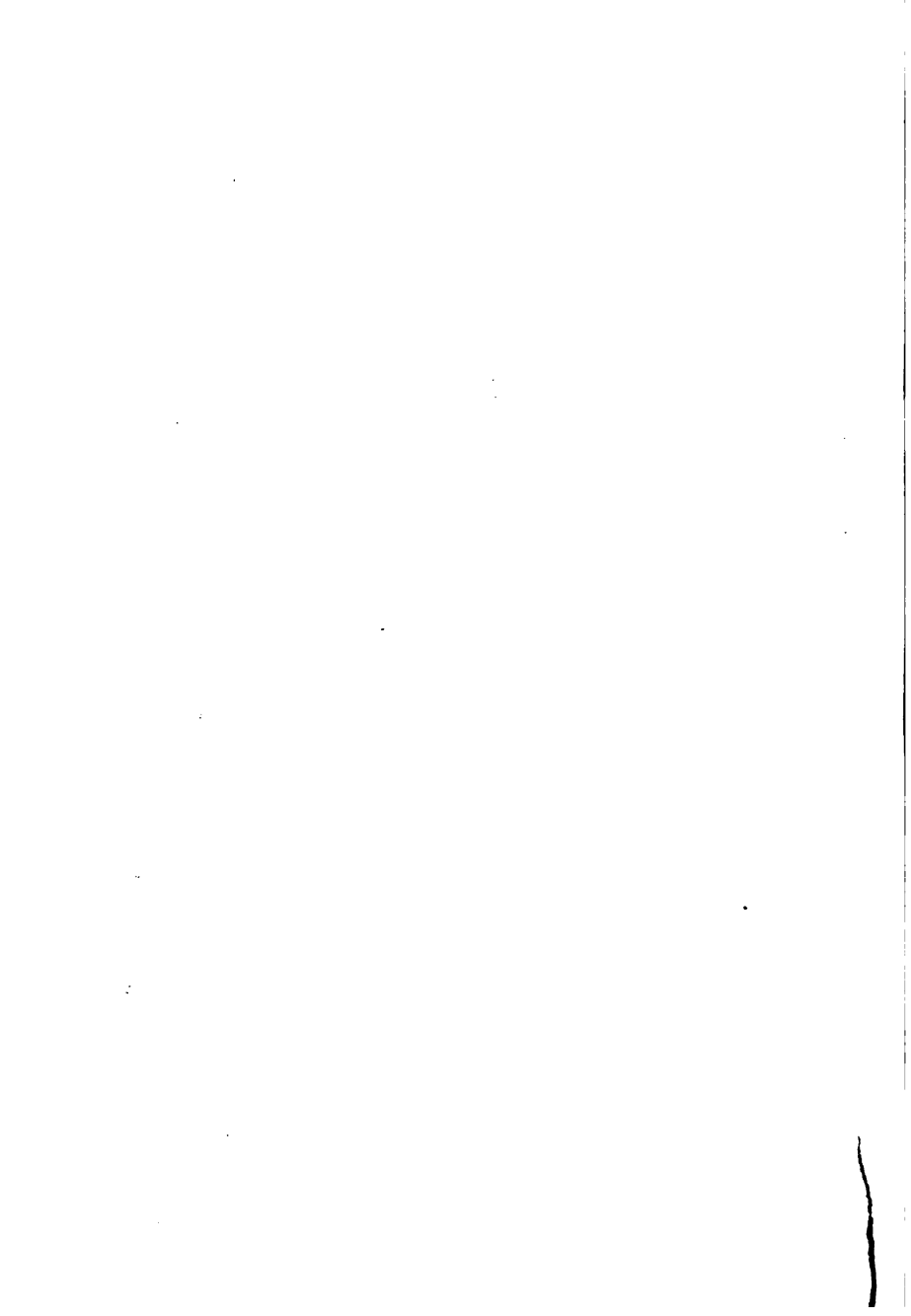






**That I have thought about the picture there.
Perhaps as word brings word and thought brings
thought
I'll tell you more that's dwelt upon my mind ;
For now I think in truth the time has come.
And my one prayer is that toward you, my son—
My only son—I shall not fail in all
My duties great and small ; for in your face
Again I see my own amid long lost
Old memories' faded pictures dear to me.**

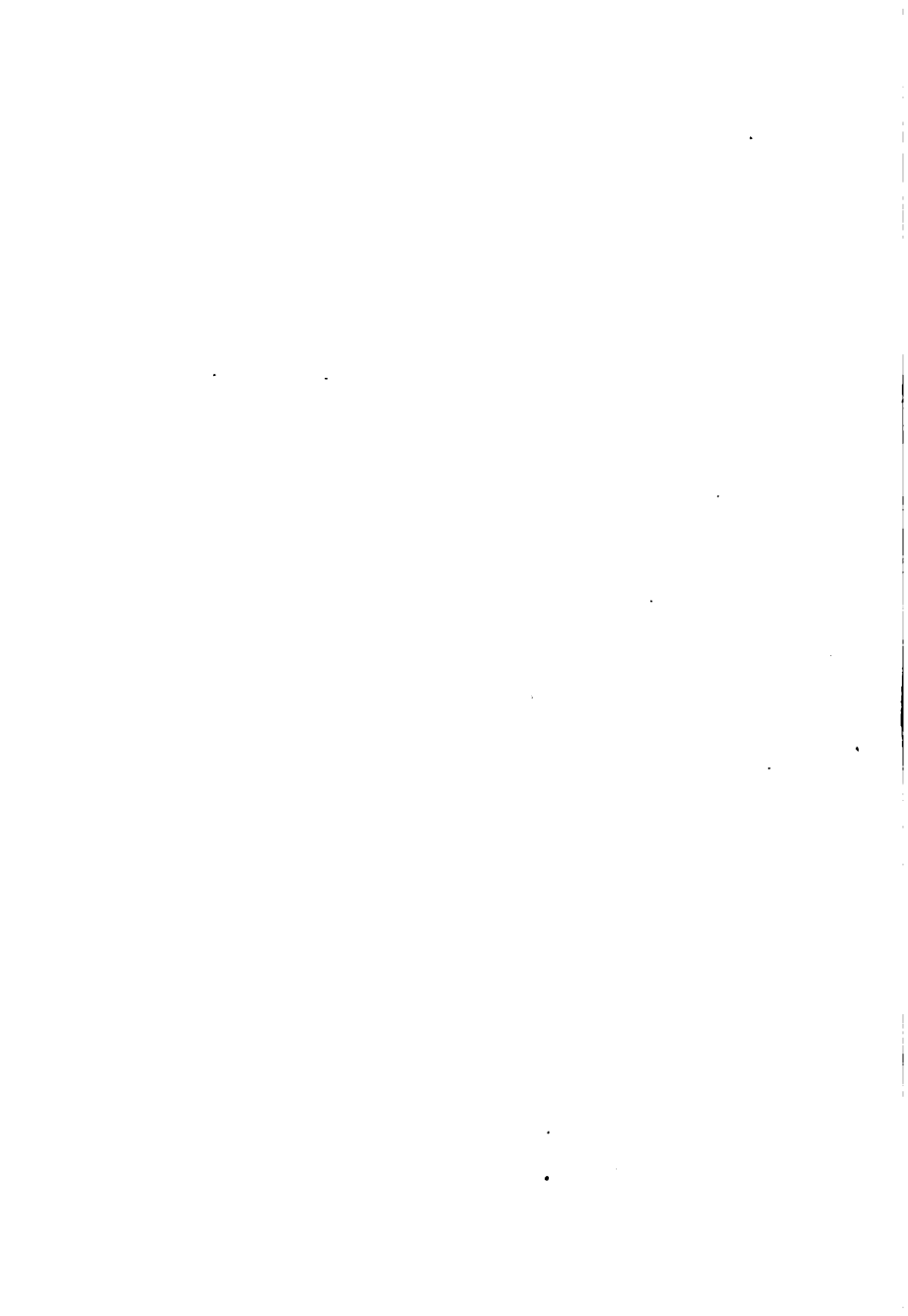






And that my life, which lives reborn in you,
Shall bring no bitter pains to chill us both,
Nor leave in you when I am gone away
The thought that neither truth nor you I loved,
'Tis well that in a quiet way I speak
Of things there in the picture by the door.
A homely scene it is and nothing more,
Much like the place where you and I now sit.
You see the mother's artless arms outstretched
Upon her son's broad shoulders young and strong;

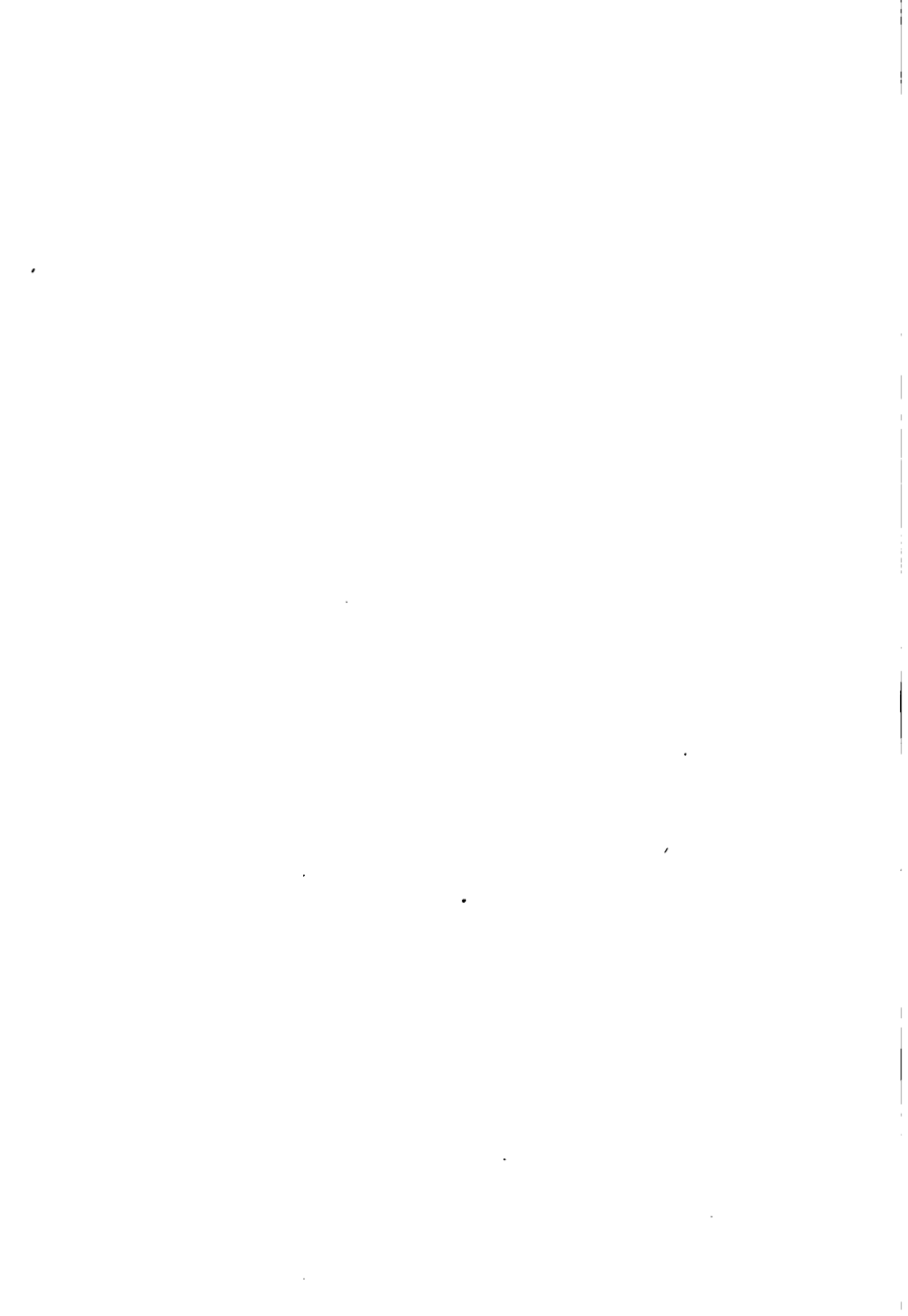






And see how sweet with all a mother's love
In honest pleading is her furrowed face ;
And his, above hers half a head, looks off
Where years of future life in fancy's eye
Pass on. Two sisters there amid the rest :
The younger one who leans beside the door
Has now her first real sorrow's tears to bear.
For sweet to her, her brother's loving voice
Will long be heard no more there where they
stand,







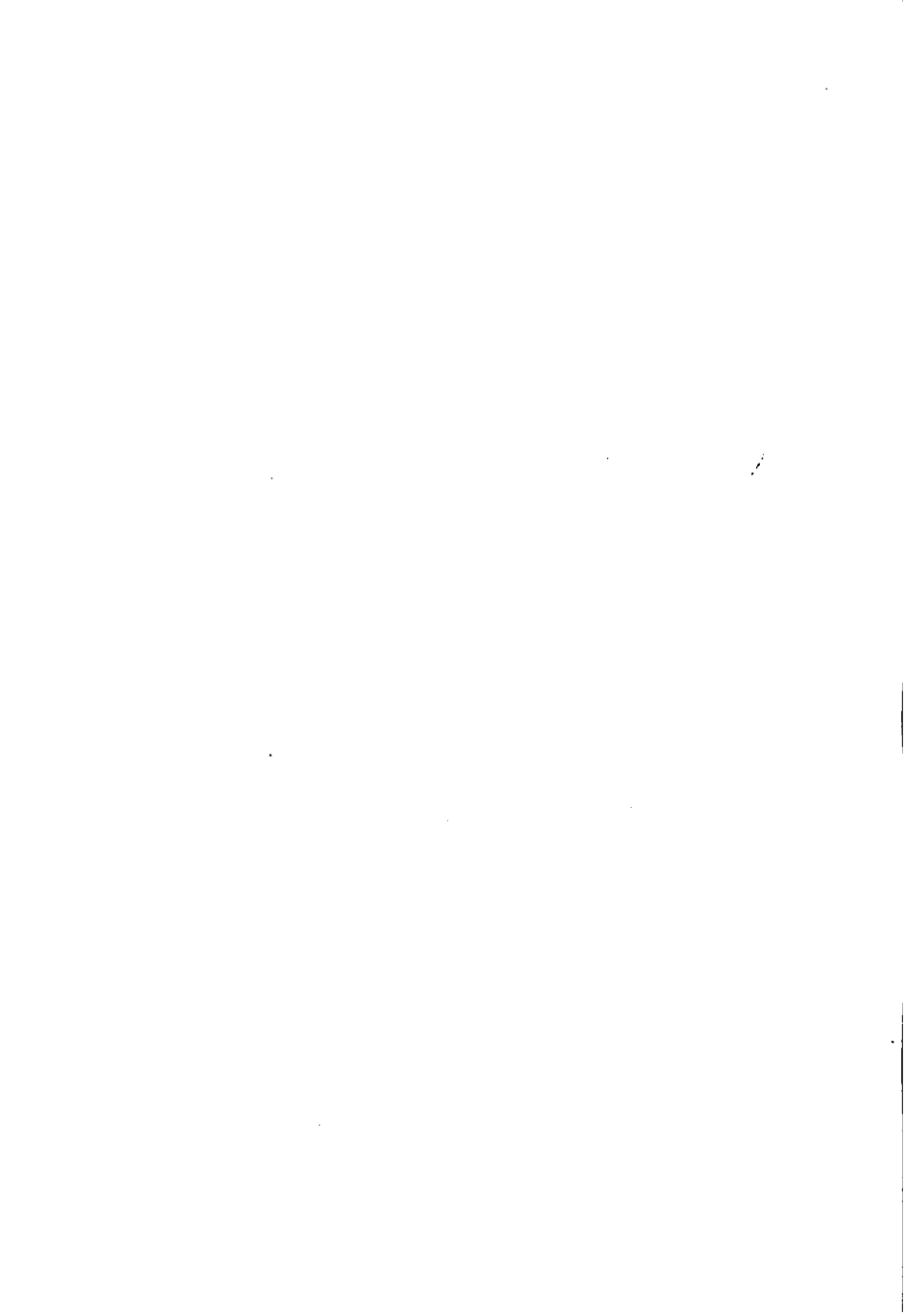
**And where each day they've seen the dawn and
dark,**

**And played and planned and hoped and laughed
together.**

**But now sad thoughts steal o'er her trembling
heart.**

**The shaggy dog holds ever watchful eyes
On his young master's pale and pensive face,
As if he somehow knew with his brute sense
That something strange had chilled his idol's life**



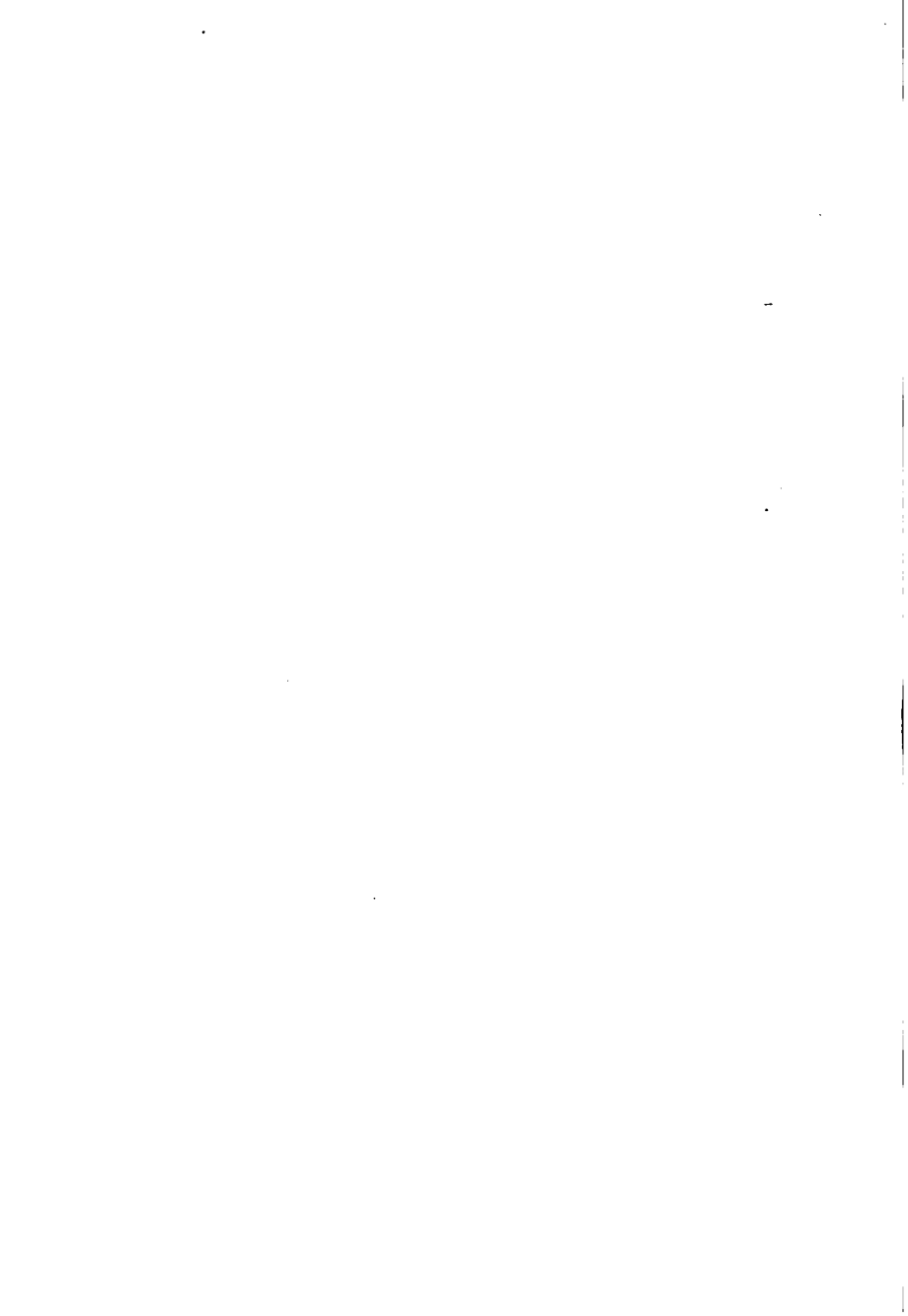




And made it sad with thought; as if he knew
For them the shadowed valleys, wood-clothed
hills,

And greenish glades, and oft-seen shrubby nooks
Would not again resound to their wild notes
As through the mornings long they sped with joy
Now here and there, nor to their inner songs
As silently they dozed all dreamful where
The grass and cooling shadows thickest lay.
And there sits too the grandmamma whose face







Shows pride in him, the son of her own child.
Perhaps she too had nursed him long and heard
His joys and griefs through all his boyish years.
She knows him well and has no fear the world
Will some day cheer his deeds with full applause.
But on the mother's face, full carved with care,
A deep devotion sits; and from her sweet
Old trembling lips, where lover's kisses long
Ago have changed to children's milder love,
There come the last strange words upon his ear

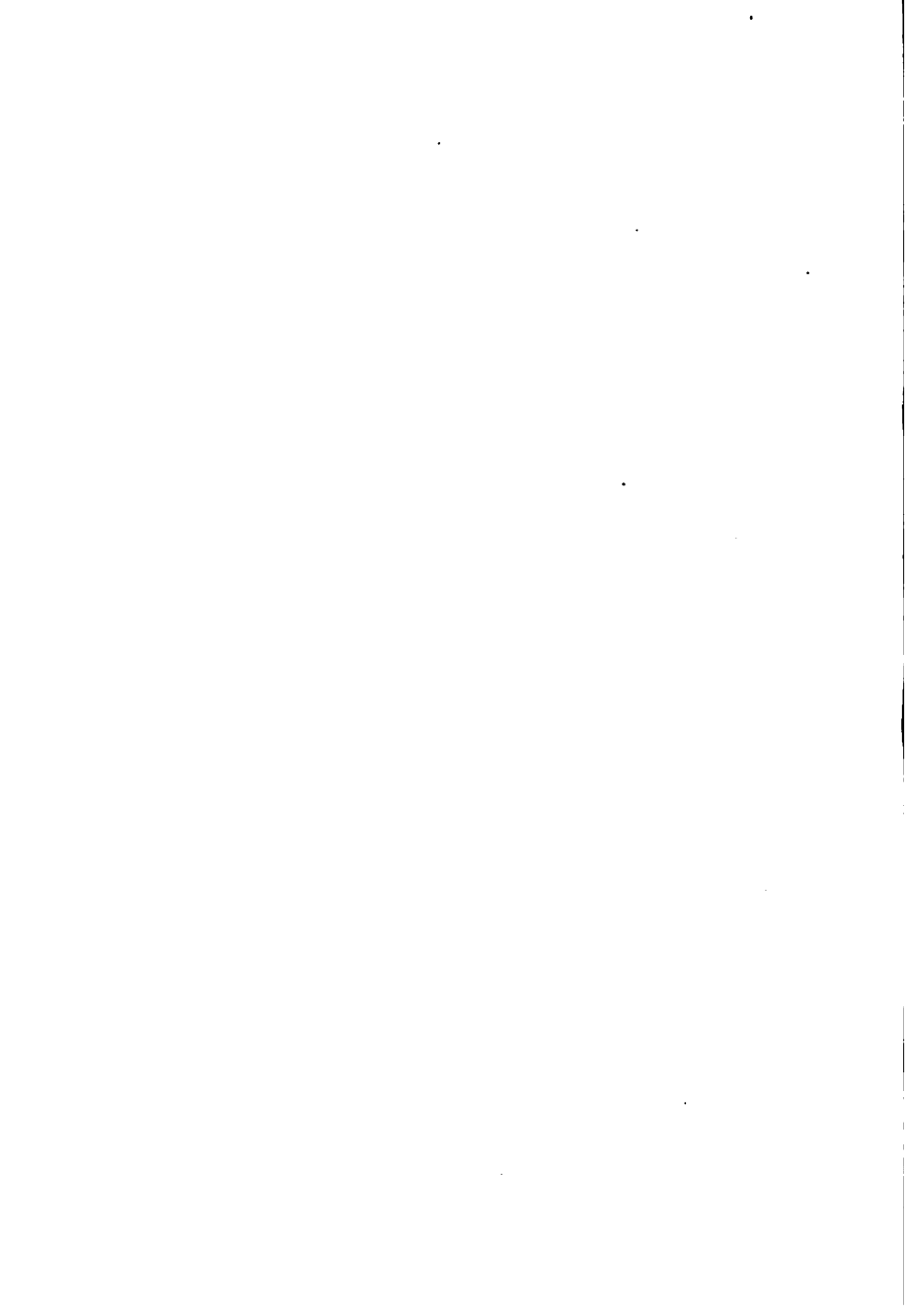






**That to distraction send his pliant heart,
Like billows on the rocks of saddened seas.
All fitful, yet with measured violence,
Her heart, long tried by wind and storm, gives up
Its deepest thoughts. The moment is supreme :
She tells him of the world. For ere the night
Of this same day shall come in noiseless step
To cover all with heaven's darkened dome,
This boy, her son, her flesh and blood, her pride
And hope, will mingle with the city's crowd.**







**In some such words as these she tries to speak
The message of her heart: " My son, my son,
Remember what I've said to you and still
Say o'er again. 'Twould break my heart, now
old,**

**Should you ignobly live. Hold high your head
And be an honest man. May kindness guide
Your daily steps, and in each deed and thought
Let Christ's sweet soul always reflect itself,
And love your fellow men as I love you.**

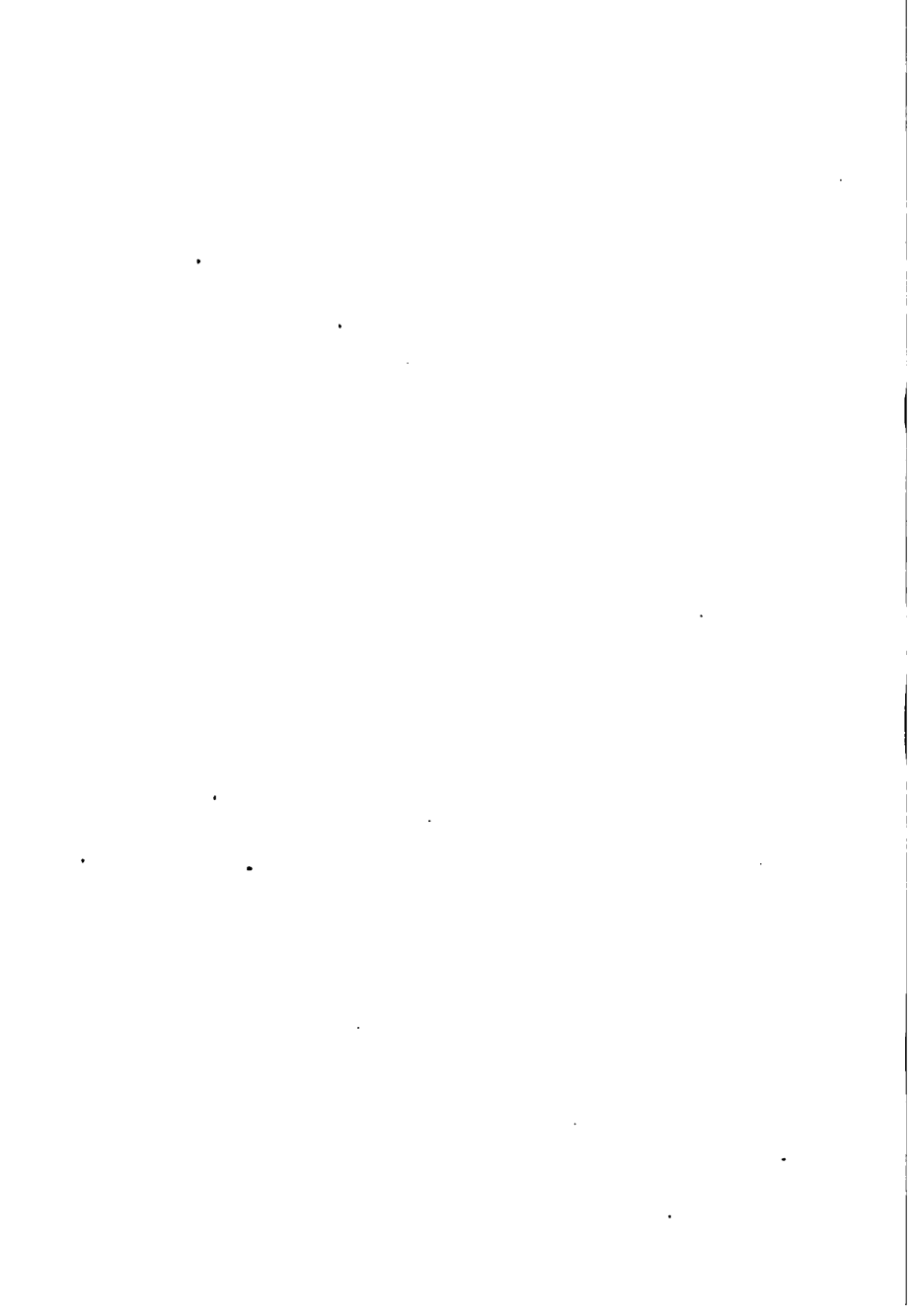






**May words unkind and false ne'er pass your lips,
Nor harsh and low ambitions drive you on.
My memory is saddened with the scenes
Of other years, for o'er departed joy
I weep and smile at faded sorrow's tears.
How many times in hallowed evening hours,
When night's soft silver light crept o'er your face,
Long years before you understood my love,
I've pressed you to my naked breast and prayed
Our God to spare my boy from pitfalls dark;**

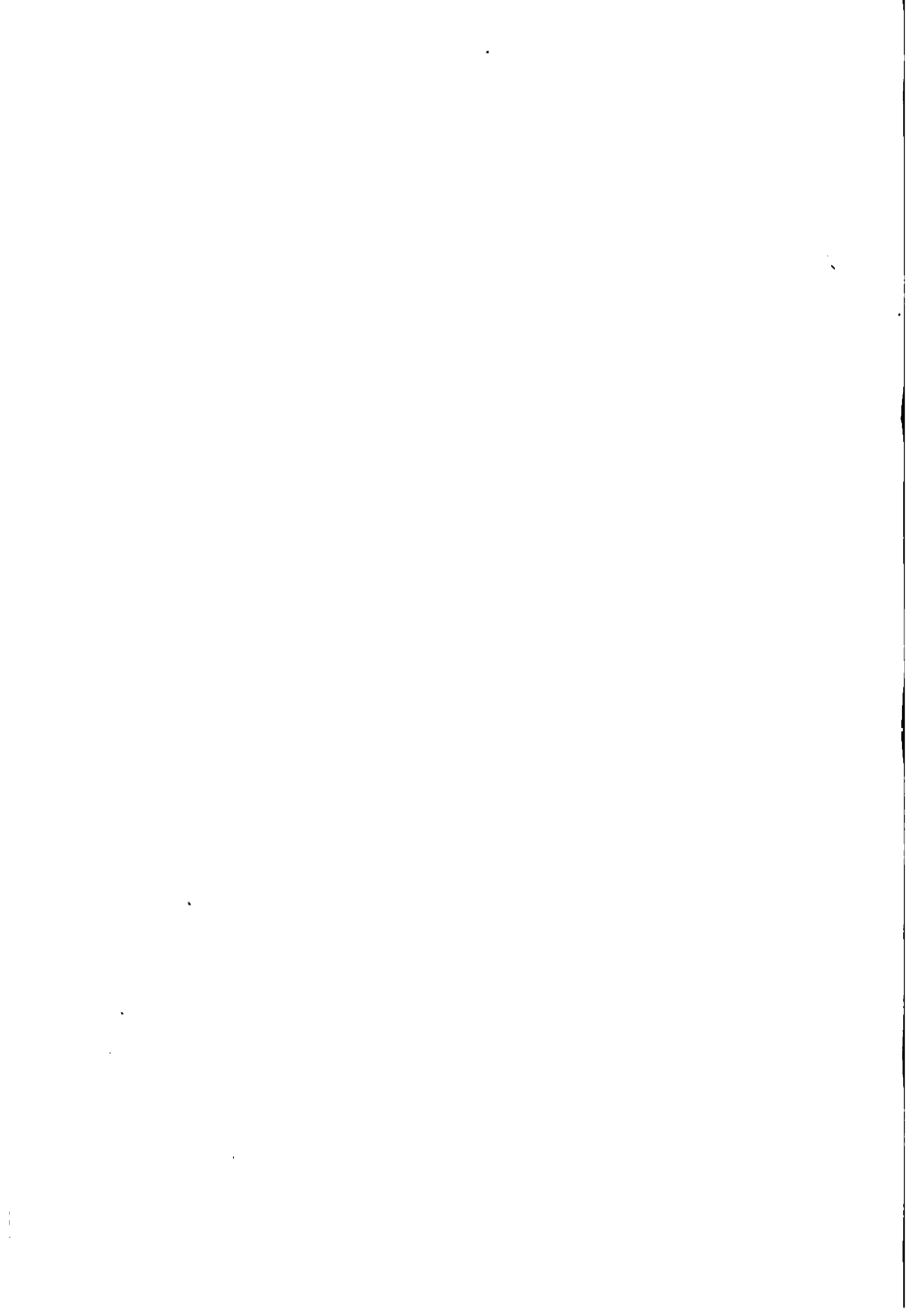






**For your warm baby's cheek was part of me !
How many times in my young wilder dreams
I've seen your face shine high above all men,
Reflecting each desire within my heart !
There's not much here in this old house,
For plainly we have lived as fits our place.
But now you go where all things may be won.
Like you, ere now have gone the greatest men
The old wide world has seen, from humble homes
Where each day's tiring toil had little brought.**

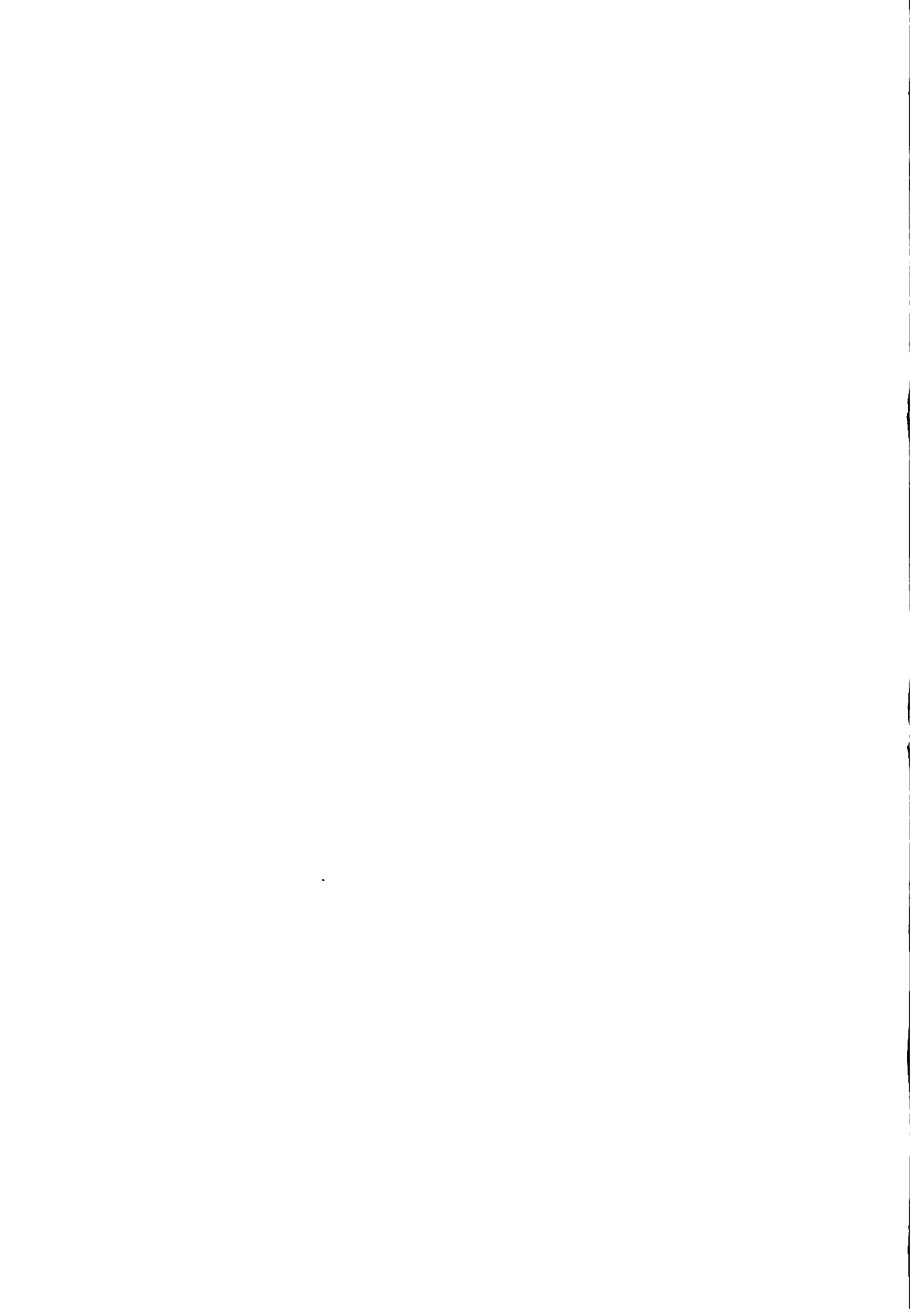






The world we've seen but from afar lies now
Outstretched before you, and will yield its gifts
If nobly you will always live, and we—
Ah! we shall watch and wait with hungry hearts
To see you climb the towers of success.
'Twill give us happiness to speak your name
And say again the things that bring to mind
Your long past childish ways. Now still once
more
I'll say what oft I said through all these years,







**While yet we talk and linger late at parting,
And this say o'er each day as my last words,
Success will come by love and truth and work.”
I fancy in a manner thus she speaks
With simple words full strong in love and pride.
The lesson she has told is from her youth—
Perhaps her father's very words, at least
His thoughts, which she by faith had made her
own.**

Such earnest words will any mother speak

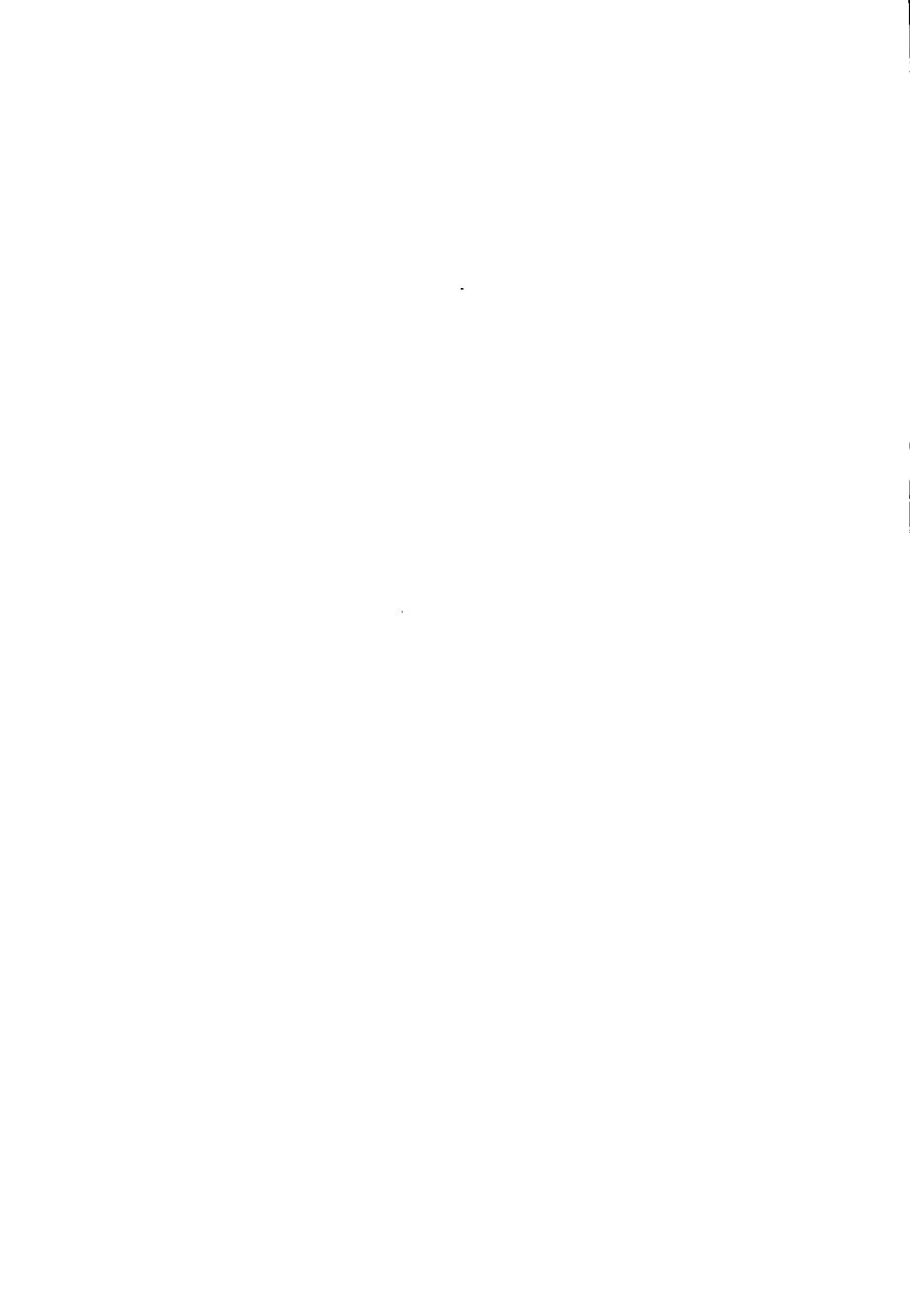






When love and parting come to try the soul.
Your own sweet mother would have spoken so,
And nigh all fathers, too, would such things say.
In part these words I told before, my boy ;
But there is something more this time to tell.
I'll keep my word and speak the truth as life
Has given me the truth to understand.
I know no world save that my eyes have seen.
Of this I'll tell you all ; but there's no haste,
We shall arrive anon, in goodly time,







While yet a few of daylight's rays shine here
Where now we sit in this calm evening's hour.
Think you, my boy, this mother knows the world
She's speaking of? Beneath one humble roof,
'Mid old familiar daily tasks and sights
Of budding green, her little world has been.
Perhaps but once each fortnight through the year
Into the city's noisy mart she goes ;
Some needful little purchase here and there
And home again in time for evening tasks.







Her only cares are those the household brings.
Full tiring, true, at times, yet sweet to her
These daily tasks for them whose love she knows ;
And 'round her peaceful door are growing green
And insects' calls and talk of trifling things.
This is her quiet little round of life
Each day and month and year where love is law.
Is this the kind of life her son will see
In that new world of swiftly moving men ?
And by these righteous laws of truth and love





**For all mankind that cross his many paths,
Will he with sure and honest step climb high
The steep and trembling towers of success?
Will wealth and beauty bought thereby be his?
You must have questioned much that I my days
Spend here with you in simple solitude.
You've seen the beauty of the city's art,
Lit bright by night where we have walked along,
And costly pictures hung within stone walls
That we have craned our necks to see, and faint**







**Music's low stealing whisper, floating dreams
Upon the night, we oft have stopped to hear,
And wandered slowly on with wavering thoughts
Of dim and far off worlds in night's great sea.
You understood these doors were closed to us.
I know in secret you have questioned much
That I, who all these things of beauty love,
Should shun them for this simple little place,
Save now and then a walk in evening's hour.
I know that world the gentle mother there**





**Now sends her boy into with lofty speech.
I, too, by work and truth and love for men
Have tried to win great gifts but failed, and then
With lesser aim was satisfied, and last
Came here with you and her who's gone away.
No hardened thoughts I've harbored through the
years
For all my youthful trials that came to naught.
These quiet scenes, this house, and freedom's joy,
With hatred for no living thing, are bliss**







Enough for one of simple wants as I.
I sometimes fancy that I could have won
The race that most men run had all my strength
Been for dead things and not for living men.
Of this no matter now, 'tis past and gone.
The world I saw and knew you, too, shall know.
From youth my father was a man of trade,
And straight he plied with care his chosen work,
And things went well and wealth came by his toil.
It was his wish, through all my early years,





**That I should follow him in his career.
And so when youth's small things I put aside,
And man's estate had crowned my boyish years,
Straightway I went to work with earnest heart.
But no success came of my efforts hard.
I lacked keen tact, they said, to deal with men,
Was too sincere, and spoke too many words,
And kept not well the secrets of the house.
And when I asked what these things meant, they
smiled,**







And straight my father told, and he his head
Would shake, and frown, but say no word to me.
Displeas'd he was and failure I saw nigh.
At last he bade me quit my work, and said
Short words that grieved my heart. He meant
no ill ;

For lack of time and overwork had made
Him brief of speech. My wants I'd have supplied,
He said, and all my time to think and dream,
And thus for one long month that longer seem'd

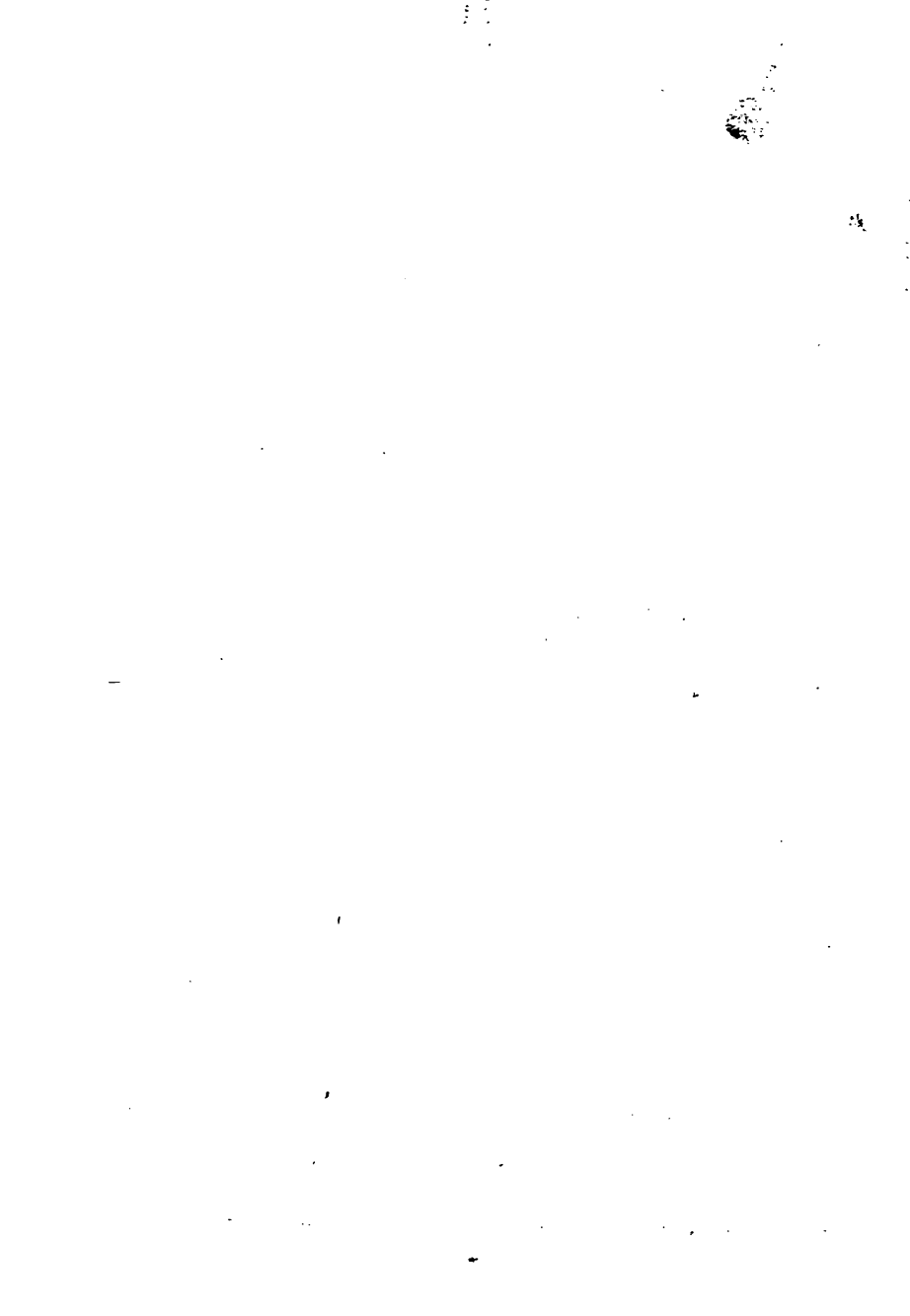






**I pondered many hours in idleness,
And ill-content grew fast upon my thoughts ;
For was this right that I should eat and live
By that another through his toil had earned ?
But one good hope then fed my hungry soul :
That I should live by what my hands could do.
Against my father's will I went away,
Denied his aid, to make 'mid other scenes
The test of life my soul had hungered for.
The first few days of maddened, rushing men**







In that strange place I'd journeyed to, set wild
My heart with craving joy to join the crowd,
For each seemed nigh upon some happy gain.
And great sky-reaching houses there I saw,
And noises loud and calls of men and boys
There were, and lines of going human forms
Which till that day I ne'er had seen before.
And further out along the well-built streets,
With fairy look in many-colored gowns,
The women passed like visions in a dream ;





**And happy, strong, and sweet-faced children
played.**

**“This is my world,” I cried, “and these who pass
Shall all with pride be glad to call me friend ;
This mighty city shall yet know my name,
And here upon this street I’ll have a house,
Where love will greet my evening’s quickened
step.**

**I’ll please my God and these things will be mine.”
I reveled in my youthful, happy dreams,**



—



**For strong I was, and doubt ne'er crossed my
mind**

**That all would come by work and truth and love.
Then o'er my peaceful soul, through each calm
night,**

**Crept low, sweet thoughts that God and life are
good.**

**Much walking through the hours of those first
days**

Brought sleep upon my eyes in early eve.





At early morn, refreshed, I rose again
To see yet more of all this wondrous life.
So quickly passed the days in joyous hope.
At length I turned my steps in search of work,
And all the day till evening's hour I walked,
But none would let me try my strength of hand.
When next the cheerful rays of morn arose,
I turned my course straight toward the moving
 throng.
And all that day, in over-anxious words,





I asked for work, and last, when night came down,
I slowly turned away with weakened faith ;
For none would hear my cause with kindly look,
And so for many days I sought in vain.
At last, some distance from the crowded town,
Along a river's hot and humid banks,
One turned a listening ear to hear my words.
Straightway I there began to swing a sledge
Of lighter weight upon the heated ore,
Amid a crowd of men half nude and black.





Oft times my muscles pained and twitched at
night;

And clashing steel, and thumping iron arms,
And hissing, foaming ore drove sleep away.

What chance was here for better things in life?

For some there were who'd swung the sledge
from youth—

So long till human shapes they had no more,

Nor minds and hearts more than the senseless
iron.





**The discontent that came soon brought a change.
My master, seeing I could read and write,
Set me to other work in crowded rooms ;
And there, with book and pen and watchful eye,
It was my task to keep all hands at work.
Women there were no longer young or strong,
And girls with joyless faces, skinny hands,
And backs that curved from stooping, stooping
low,
And dipping, dipping, endless dipping down**





The wares into a hot and fuming pool.
With begging, haggard eyes they glanced at me,
And some with timid looks, for, worn by work,
They sought a moment's rest from bending down,
But feared a costly mark upon my book.
Some time went on and nature then refused.
"My God," I cried at last, "I'll be no part
To grind the souls of these for profit's sake!"
And straight I went to tell my master so.
He laughed into my face and called me fool,



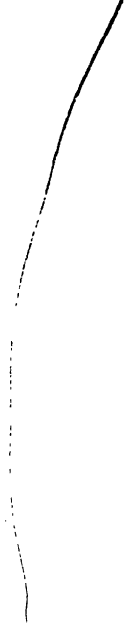




Then sterner grew and bade me leave his place.
Thus once again I joined the maddened crowd,
And once again became a wanderer.
My hopes, at first so full of certain joy,
Now doubtful grew and questioned much my
faith.

But had not I been true to love and truth
And for this faithfulness been turned away?
Some days went by before again I found
Amid the throng one who would give me work.







And then, with might and hope's returning joy,
I set my mind and heart to each small task :
The contents of the store to learn, details
Of many kinds, that I might well serve him
Who from all darkening doubts had drawn me
off.

And soon it came the time to try what skill
I had to deal with patrons of the shop.
Again much hoped success was not my lot,
And one passed out the door who nothing bought.





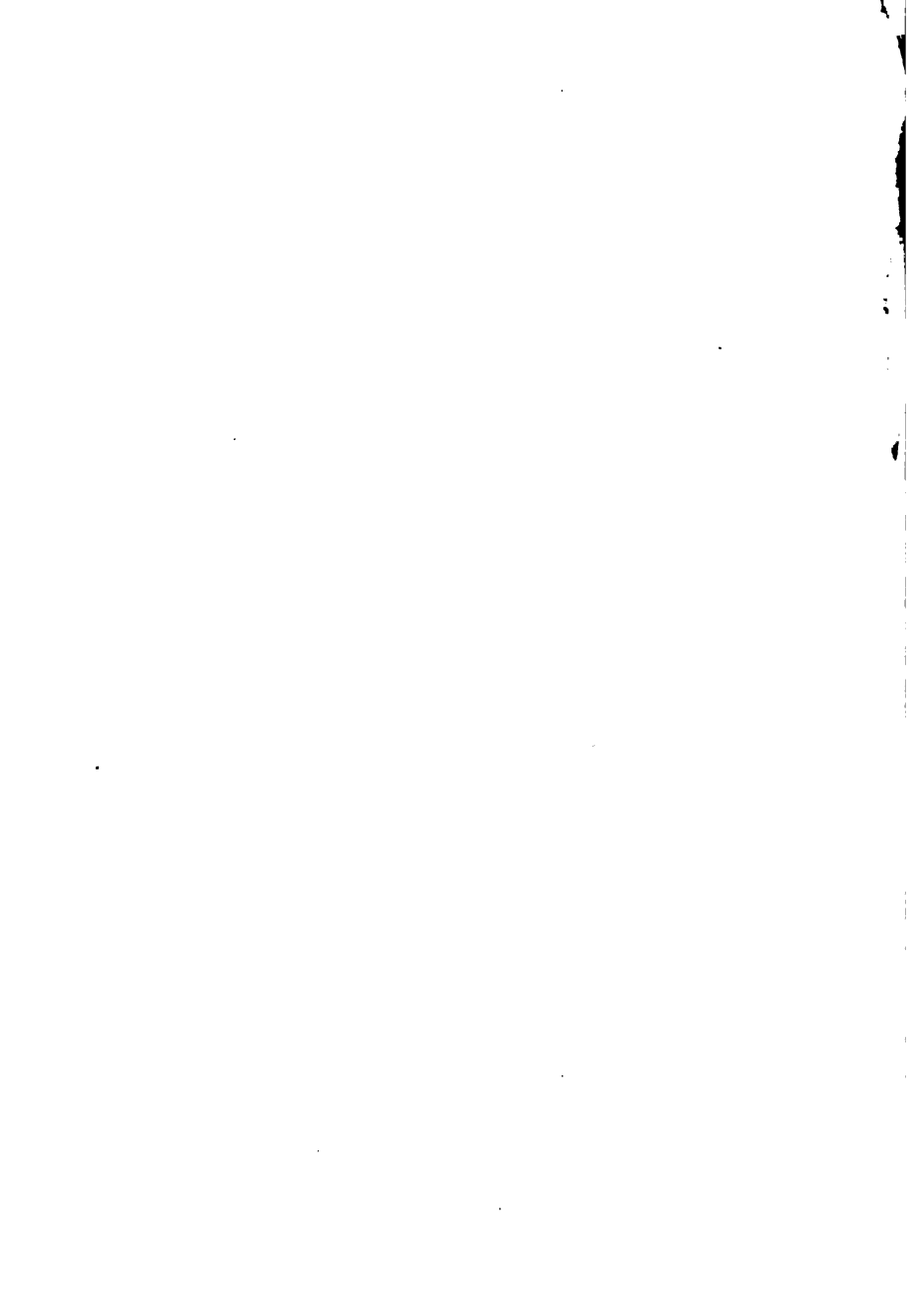
My master came all flushed, and angry grew,
And in harsh words declared I had no art
To draw a patron 'gainst his pliant will,
Nor hide some slight defect the wares might have,
Nor speak with all of cunning might and main—
Whate'er the speech—his valued goods to sell.
The more he spoke the more his passions grew.
With boyish fear I sought unharmed to go.
My arm he held and would not let me pass,
Until I silently my God implored





To spare this flesh He'd put my soul into.
At last I jerked away and hatless ran
Upon the street, again to join the crowd.
Long hours I walked into that troubled night,
And thought and thought, and prayed for light
and strength
From Him who made the beauty of the night
And playful sunbeams sent in quiet woods
Where oft my childish steps had tarried long.
If answer came to me I heard it not,







And slow upon my heart grew bitterness,
And hate made room to live where love had
dwelt ;

And want I saw ahead as days passed on,
I made resolve to win as other men
Had won and question not the means I used.
One night I walked far down the river's edge,
Where sounds of sizzling ore had bruised my ear,
And where at first I'd earned my daily bread ;
There I stood within the mill's deep shadow







And from my bosom cut the last small coin
To pay the morrow's lodging. Words I heard,
And turned to find some one was standing near.
"You coming back to work?" a woman's voice
It was, and one I thought I'd heard before.
"You coming back to work?" she asked again;
And now I saw by light of corner lamp
The kindly face of one I once had known
Who dipped the wares into the fuming pool.
These simple words were sweet and soft and low,







**As if from angels sent to cheer my heart ;
And there amid the silent, shadowed gloom,
Beside the pulseless, melancholy mill,
My courage broke, and like a child I wept,
And poured my troubled soul's deep sadness forth.
But when the tears were gone my sorrows went,
For God again was good in all the world,
And peaceful lay the solemn, starry night.
Thus on my early manhood's broken dreams
There came another dream that holds me still,**







**Though now the gray of twilight time is here,
And evening shadows sit upon my brow,
And things forgot and dead keep memory's
dreams**

Of unregretful love still pure and sweet.

**In this girl's mother's house I found a home,
And there—though all was plain and poor—I
lived**

**For many months. More failures came and
went;**







But still grim hold I kept upon my dreams
To live as pleased the voice that whispered on
Through all the years within my better self.
A trade I learned, and one that to this day
Supplies enough for all our simple wants.
O'er my ambition's maddened greed came love
And milder hopes and truer faith in Him,
The Father of us all. Again I walked
In night's still hours; but now no more alone
To brood o'er failures that I could not bear.





**With her I walked who in the later years
Bore you, my son. Though simple were our
lives,
Not once our lips complained; and each sweet
joy
We drank that comes from work and truth and
love.
No mighty castle rose above our heads
With lofty mien; but at each ended day
The star-lit dome of God's all peaceful night**



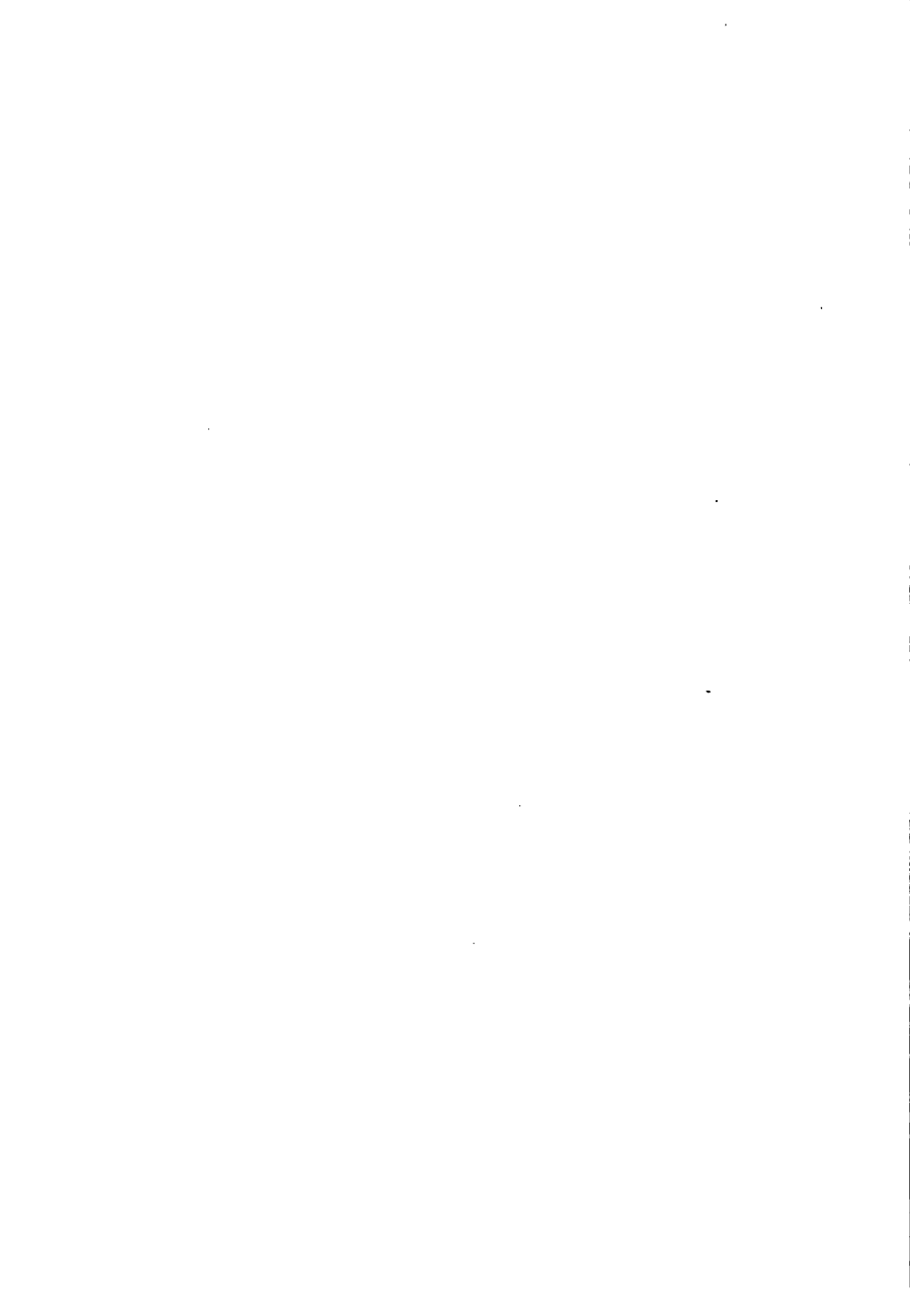


**Held fast our faith and love through all the years.
And now, my son, choose you what course you'll
lead.**

**Keep sweet your soul and humbly live by work;
Or in the rasping din of trade's fierce war,
With worn and whirling brain and hardened
heart**

**That must crush out nigh all of truth and love,
Attain that which the world still calls success.
By nature some are made to feel no pain**







At dreary sights of want and suffering.
And some have hearts that beat with every heart.
Know thou thyself, and live to please thy soul.
See, now the night has come upon us here
And hid the picture there that's squared in oak ;
And now I've told what's been upon my mind,
That you might know the world and yet be free
From tearful brooding nights such as must come
Upon that boy the mother's talking to.
For houses grand and beauty made by toil





Are gained more oft by mastery o'er men
Than by kind words and gentle brotherhood.
Love men and truth, and poverty most like
Will dine with you, but peace will feed your soul.
Let selfishness guide all your thoughts and acts,
And in old age your storehouse may be full
Of grain and goods; for truth and love of men
Will garner only peace and inward joy.
Some fathers would speak otherwise to sons
Held dear; and yet I've kept my faith and shown

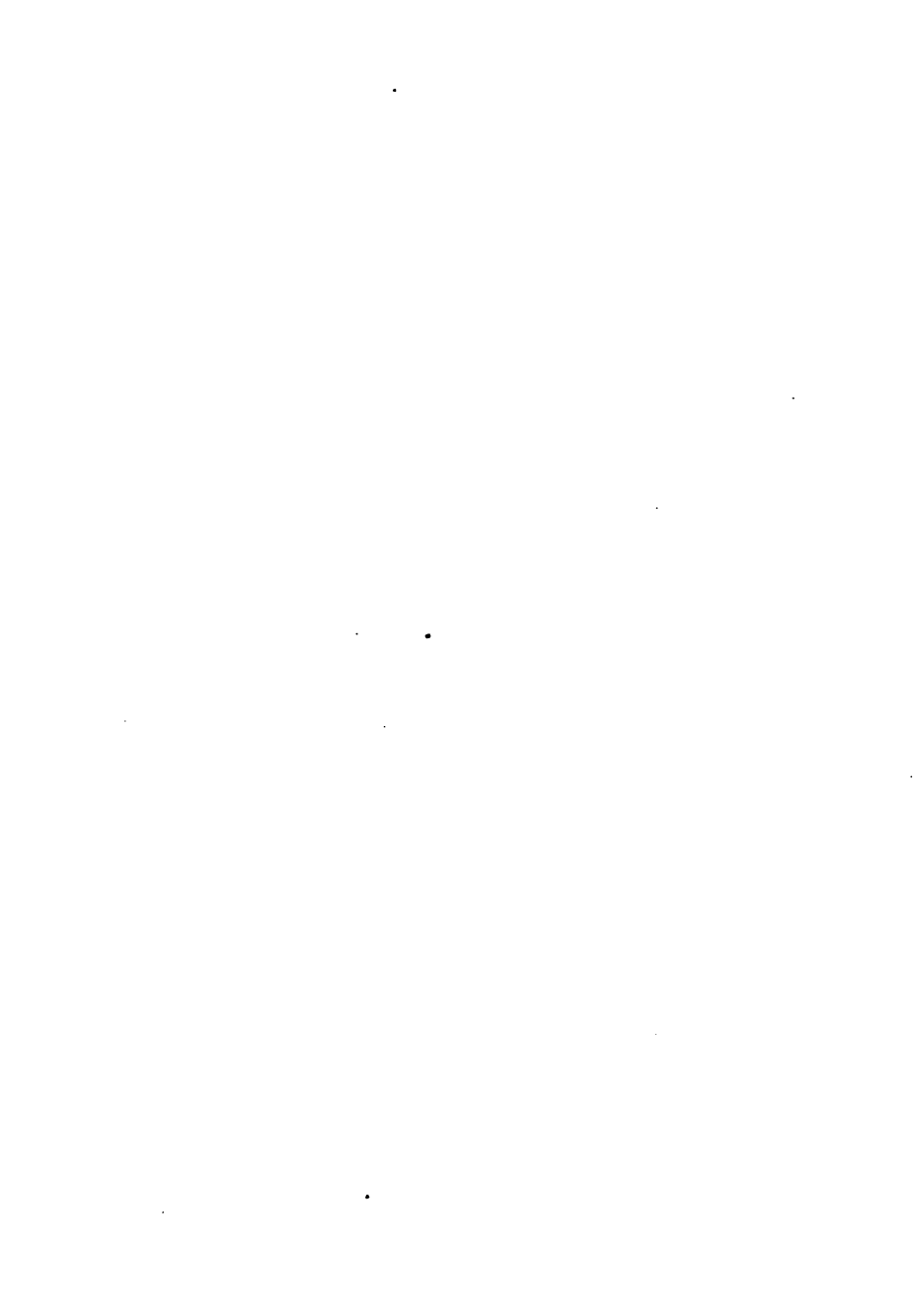






To you, my boy, the only world I know.
Remember this : whichever course you choose,
You'll sometimes turn about and walk awhile
The other way, for none of human kind
Is all of good or all of evil made.
Let this and honest poverty not turn
Your heart in bitterness and wild despair
To hardened thoughts of Him who made all
things.
See how yon lingering light of faded day







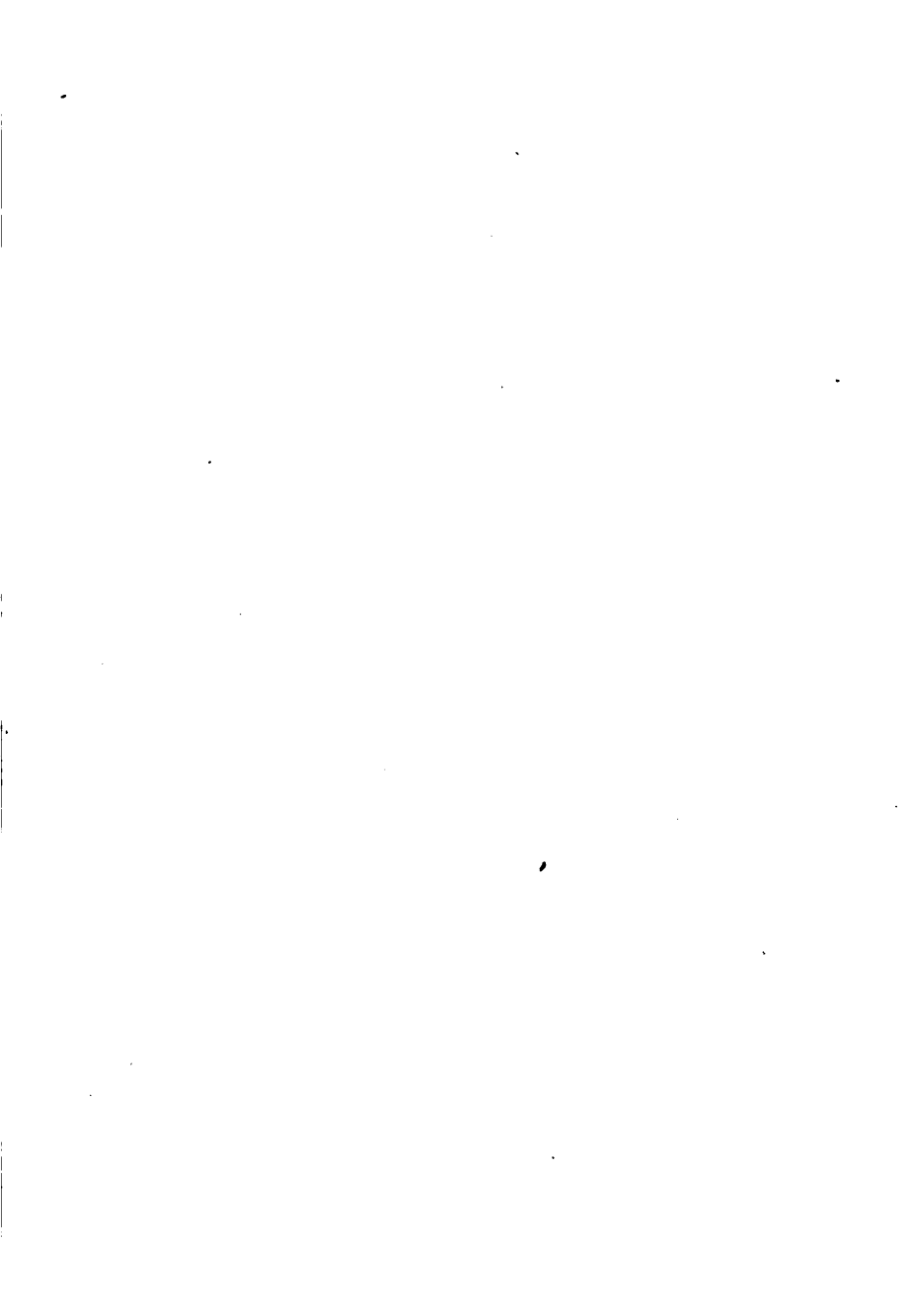
**Commingles now the dark of falling night
Behind the western hills, and lower down
Within that opening vale a fiery red
Burns forth as if from out another world,
And near the earth the many-fingered trees
Turn dark the crimson glow; along the east
All silent, like a modest maid, the stars
Steal through the stilly night; and now a breeze
Hums soft and low in luring notes scarce heard.
Thus not from lowly man's inconstant life,**

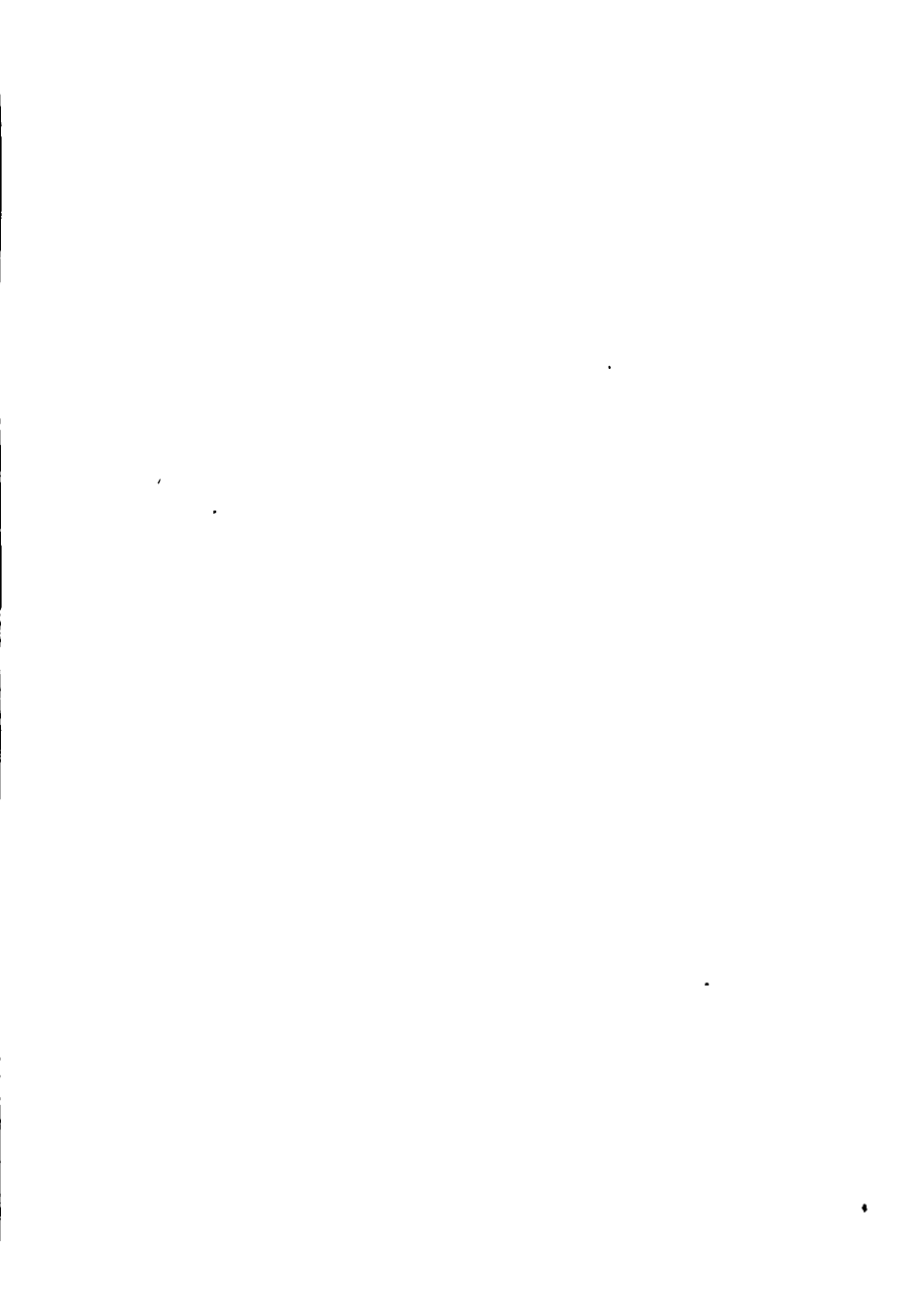


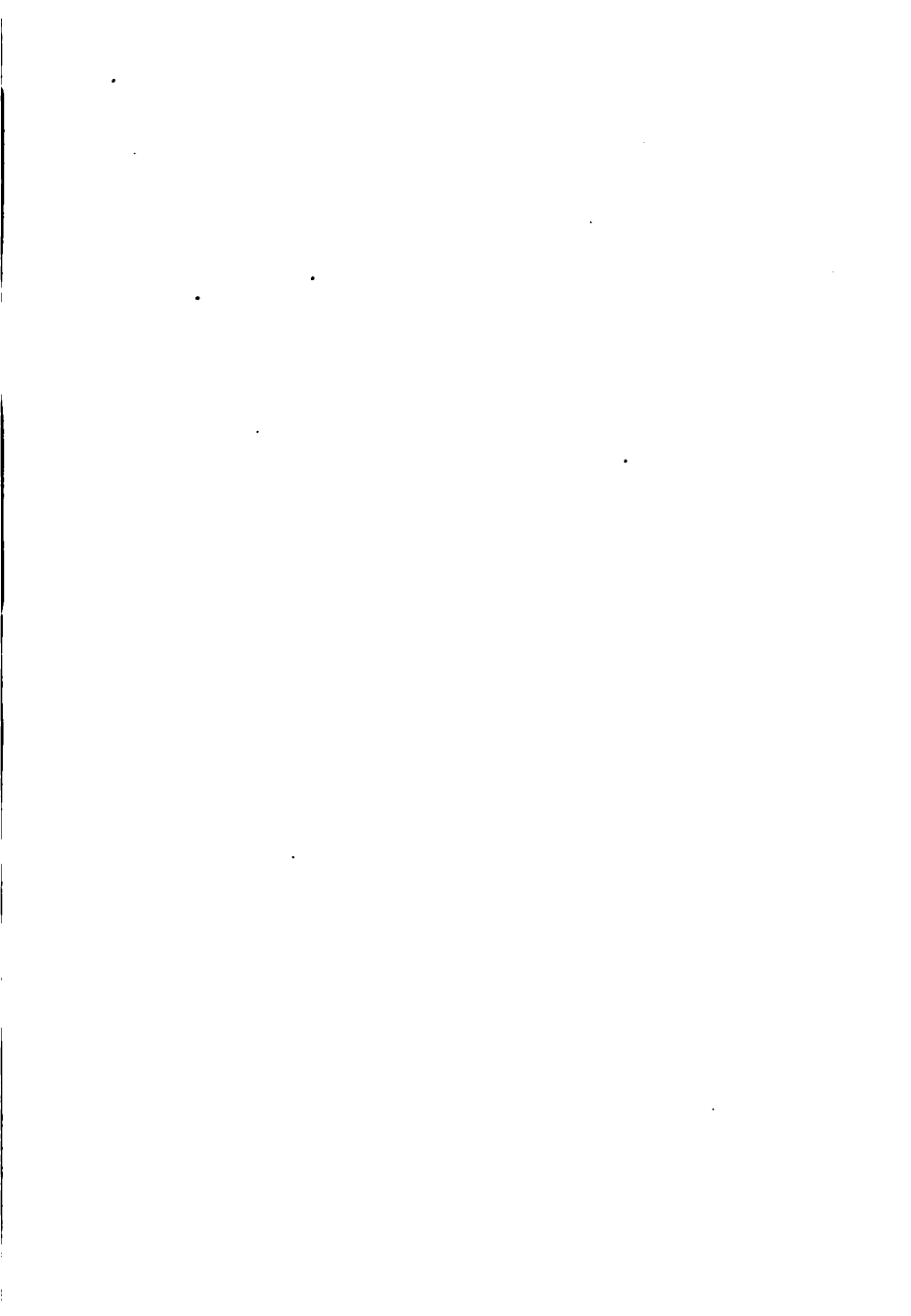


**But from the brooding beauty of the night,
And daily dancing shafts of golden sun—
The mystery and wonder of the world—
That play the soundless music of the soul
And fill the heart with memory's olden dreams—
From these will come at last your faith in God.**



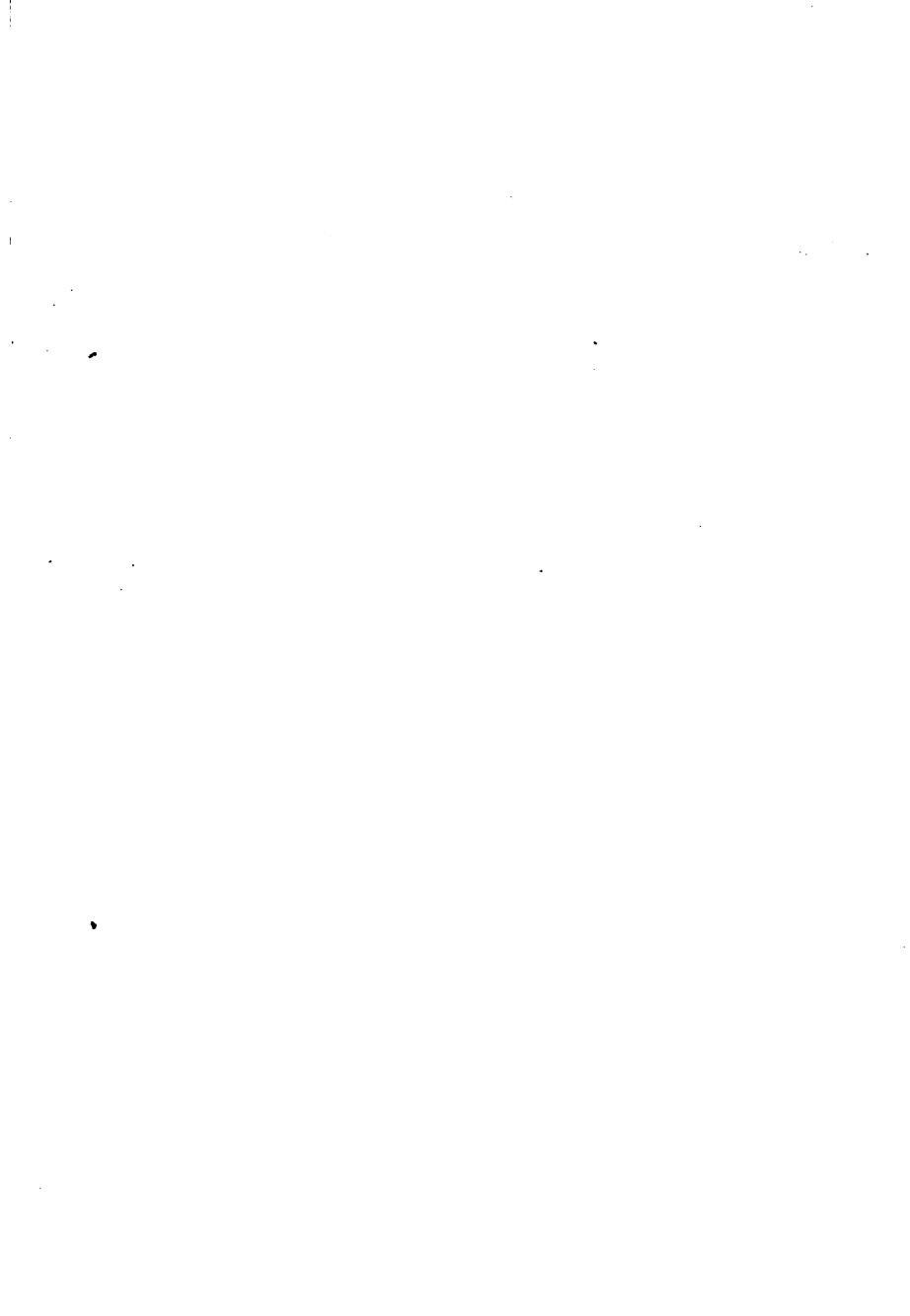












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